The Culture of our Better Selves

Feb. 22, 1948

The Culture of our Better Selves.

Ps.86:11 Teach me thy way.
Ps.143:10 Teach me to do thy will.
Ps. 40:8 I delight to do thy will.

INTRO. Story from the Chinese rice fields-Keep the Soul on Tpp.

Cultivation of rice on small farms

Rice the most important food inChina.

"Have you had your rice? Not breakfast, supper or dinner.

Dikes around a small piece of land

Rice planted in rows. After growing a few months, water gradually drained off, until rice is yellow and ripe.

Rice harvested, beaten out ot thesstraw and prepared for food.

When the water is on the fields, snails breed rapidly and the herons, or stork come and feed on the snails. On this common sight, the Chinese story is based.

While a stork was thus engaged with his head in the mud seeking snails, a heavenly swan came and began to tell the stork all about the beauties and glories and wonders of heaven. But the stork paid no attention. The swan continued and painted the picture of heaven so glowingly that the stork lifte his head for a moment long enough to ask, "Are there any snails in heaven?" And upon being told that there were no snails in heaven, the stork immediately beplied, "I'm looking for snails, and again buried his head in the mud.

We humans are inclined to look for snai we fail to look up. We fail to look for the higher things of life, so engrossed are we in the lower things. This story tells us

to keep out of the mud. We have bodies but we are souls. Cultivate the soul. Look up! Live up! Lift up!

For the culture of our better selves, let us consider these three texts:

Ps. 86:11 Teach me thy way.
Ps. 143:10 Teach me to do thy will
Ps. 40:8 I delight to do thy will

I. Before we can be taught we must be willing to learn.

1. Life is a school and we make our progress by learning life's lessons.
2. Progress implies direction and direction leads to goals.
3. Spiritual culture has its goals.
   a. There is progress towards knowledge. Education does not stop when we leave school. We learn to live and when we cease to learn we cease to live.
   b. There is progress towards wisdom. We must learn to use aright the knowledge we acquire. Some people know a great deal, but are fools in the conduct of l life.
   c. There is progress towards self-control. One must learn to control the whole of himself if he would give the right direction. Before he can will to do what he believes he should do he must have control of his thoughts, his desires, his actions. One cannot be his true self without self-mastery.
   d. There is progress towards sympathy. Wellington use to say that one of the great secrets of successful generalship was the power to imagine what was going on behind a stone wall. Imagination is the twin sister to sympathy. Imagination enables us to put ourselves in the other's plane. We are social beings and one cannot fully realize himself

apart from others.

I. Teach me thy way. The way of God is the will of Godfor us. Spiritual culture enables us to learn what the will of God is. "What doth God require of thee, o man?" Until we make a full and unconditional surrender of self to the will of God we cannot enter fully into the Kingdom of God. We cannot make the surrender until we know the way, the will of God.

A right study of the Bible enables us to learn the way and will of God. Right thinking does the same thing. Experience teaches thus,

II. Teach me to do thy will. (also. Merely to know the way of God does not put us in that Way. We must not only learn what the Way is, but we must learn how to walk in that Way. We must learn to do the will of God.

We learn more by doing than we do by learning. Book-knowledge is useful, but is not an end in itself. The value of the sciences (or of anything, for that matter) is found in their applications to meet the the needs of men. The value of the knowledge of God's will, likewise, is in the application of it to our lives, in the doing of it.

III. I delight to do thy will. When one has learned what the will of God is and has practiced it by doing it until it has become a habit, then he takes delight in it. He finds his great happiness and joy in it.

Take one who has music in him. When he begins to learn some instrument, the beginnings may be tedious to him. He hates to practice. But after he has learned to play and can play w well, he takes delight in his playing. He loves his music, and it becomes to him a source of joy and satisfaction.But his fullest joy comes only when he plays before othhers an wins their praises. In fact, one cannot truly play any instrument until he can, by playing before

others, impart to them somewhat of his own delight in it. I think of the master musicians. Their supreme delight is not in the monetary remuneration they receive, but in the delight and pleasure they give to others who eagerly listen.

It is the same with the doing of God's will. When one has mastered the will of God until he can bless and better the lives of others by the doing of it, there comes to him the supreme joy of living. His surrender to the will of God becomes contagious, and his doing of it habitually makes others the better and the happier because of it.

Conclusion. The doing of one's best according to the will of God is never a lost effort, is never in vain. Listen to the poet Browning from his "Abt Vogler"

"Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever over the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arc; in heaven, the perfect round.

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity confirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for
earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself
in sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that He heard it once; we shall hear it
by and by."

Lord, teach me thy Way.
Lord, teach me to do thy will.
I delight to do thy will.